

Clinging to Hope

by SHERALYN ROMAN

This time of year often seems to bring out the very best in people and that's what leaves me clinging to hope; for our community, our country and our world. Hope that enough people will "do the right thing," and help spread joy and positivity, over poverty and war; hope that enough politicians will actually fund hospitals over greenbelt development, and hope that someone, somewhere, will get the message that simply wearing a mask or not sending your kid to school while they are sick might actually help end this never-ending wave of viral illness. Of course, that would require me to also cling to the hope that systemic changes like paid sick days and a basic living wage existed so that people could AFFORD to make better choices like staying at home for a couple of days. Alas, despite my very honest attempt at maintaining positivity - just this once - I'm not sure it was meant to be. I'm still clinging to hope but my hopes for "hope" are slim.

At a time when inflation is running rampant, food prices are soaring and "seasonal flu" is sending children to the hospital in droves, it's incredibly difficult to stay hopeful. Knowing that more people than ever before are facing barriers also makes it hard to stay hopeful. As an example, in the past twelve months (according to a report for the Daily Bread Food Bank) 1.99 million people have faced food insecurity and trusted a food bank as their supplementary (or stand-alone) source of food in order to meet their family's needs. Often, these are families WITH employment. It turns out it is not even enough to say that we need sustainable social benefits for the under-employed, the marginalized, or persons with disabilities when even those who have employment and housing are no longer able to adequately support themselves.

More and more families, some of whom never dreamed of needing outside support, are now turning to organizations (like CCS locally) for assistance.

It's also hard to remain hopeful, and frankly almost impossible not to become hopelessly skeptical, when we see for ourselves the barren shelves at pharmacies where children's Tylenol or adult Buckley's (it does indeed taste awful but it works) are not just hard to come by, they are non-existent altogether. Forget the convoy conspiracies, I want to know what global cabal is holding on to all of the drugs necessary to help fight the flu "especially when it seems the flu is so freaking dangerous this year!"

Speaking of the flu, RSVs, and yes - COVID, let's talk about healthcare. I can't help but feel virtually hopeless when I know that if our healthcare system was appropriately funded, people could go to emergency, receive timely care before critical illness took hold and that children would not be struggling for every breath and airlifted to hospitals hundreds of miles from home. (As an aside, wouldn't properly funding hospitals and nursing staff be cheaper than ORNGE life flights? Asking for a friend.) I also know that some school boards are currently returning, at least temporarily, to a mask mandate to try and help protect our youngest members of society but it seems as though Dufferin-Peel is not one of them. I suppose since Mr. Ford never did build that "iron ring" around vulnerable seniors, it would be incredibly naive of us to expect him, our Chief Medical Officer of Health, or our local top doctor (where, oh, where is Dr. Loh when you need him?) to do anything simple in support of children who are, after all, also a vulnerable population. In short, if you are vulnerable in any way - I would venture to say the only free access to health care you MIGHT easily qualify for is MAID.

Perhaps you feel, as I often do, overwhelmed with the magnitude of need and of your own individual inability to contribute much in the way of support. How do we make a difference in the world when each successive crisis seems insurmountable and only compounds the suffering of those already demoralized and downtrodden? Where do you donate? How do you give back when there is so much work to be done and your own expenses and stress levels are piling up, too? It's at times like these that I get down and depressed, knowing I have to sometimes make some difficult choices, but consoling myself that at least I do still have the option of choice.

So, how do you fight the overwhelm and cling to hope? ARE you clinging to hope? Might I suggest you consider giving where you can, and in whatever amount that is affordable to you and not worry what others are doing. Maybe you can volunteer to feed

unhoused persons through a local organization like the Knights Table or one you personally support. Maybe you can't solve the housing crisis but you can help feed people. Maybe we can't all work at a hospital in place of a properly trained nurse but you could opt to wear a mask if you're feeling less than ideal and that might lead to one less child fighting for their life in an overcrowded hallway in an already over capacity pediatric ward. Perhaps you feel defeatist about the very real possibility that the greenbelt will be paved over but you CAN still protest and fight for what's worth saving because in my most hopeful comment of this whole column - we do still live in a democracy.

Whether I am hopeful or delusional about this last point is up for debate, but you can still ask our federal, provincial and municipal governments for a Christmas present - to respect the greenbelt boundaries for our own and our children's futures. I cling to hope for no other reason than it's all we've got ? because if you think food is expensive now?